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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

BOOKS.

[Books relating to folk-lore or mythology will receive notice, provided that a copy be sent to the editors of this Journal. Such copy may be addressed to the care of the publishers directly, or to the General Editor.]

USI E COSTUMI, CREDENZE E PREGIUDIZI DEL POPOLO SICILIANO. Raccolti e Descritti da GIUSEPPE PITRÈ. Palermo: Libreria L. Pedone Lauriel di Carlo Clausen. 1889. 4 vols., 8vo.

This is one of the few works which absolve the reviewer from the task of criticism of opinion, and leave only the pleasanter duty of expressing admiration and esteem. Whatever may be thought of the importance of popular traditions in their relation to the history of philosophy, there can be no question as to their value for the nations to which they belong. In many directions, linguistic, poetic, historical, they must continue to be a precious inheritance for centuries after they have ceased to exist on the lips, and become a matter of literary record. In our own language, indeed, the stream of oral lore flows somewhat scantily, though allusions in the earlier literature show how picturesque and interesting was the national life of England before the Reformation, Puritanism, and modern education broke off in this respect historical continuity, and separated the customs and faith of modern Britain from those of Britain in the Middle Ages. In Sicily, where such causes of change have been far less effectual, where the present is less remote from the mediæval past, and the ancient stock of beliefs, habits, and ideas is rich and abundant, a harvest can be reaped which leaves fewer losses to regret, and which must forever be valuable to all speakers of the Italian tongue. By gathering this store, and embracing in his collection everything which helps to perfect a record of the life of the Sicilian people, Giuseppe Pitrè has earned the honor of perpetual memory, and produced a work which centuries will not render useless.

The work before us, on the habits, customs, beliefs, and prejudices of the Sicilian people, is the concluding part (volumes 14-18) of the library of Sicilian popular traditions ("Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari Siciliane"), an undertaking on which Pitrè has been engaged for twenty years. The preceding parts of the library include Songs ("Canti popolari Siciliani," 2 vols., 1870), Tales ("Fiabe, Novelle e Racconti pop. Sicil.," 4 vols., 1875), Proverbs ("Proverbi Sicil.," 4 vols., 1880), and Spectacles and Feasts ("Spettacoli e Festi pop. Sicil.," 1 vol., 1881). A volume on Studies of Popular Poetry, one on Games of Children, and one on Legends, also belong to the series. A volume on Popular Medicine (vol. xix.) will conclude the work.

The scope of the four volumes under consideration may best be described in the words of the author:—

"In spite of these difficulties (of drawing a distinction between superstition and custom) a tacit separation can be observed in the course of this work; and the reader will see successively pass before his eyes, the carnival, with all its extravagances and absurdities, the exhibition of marionettes,

tale-tellers, various reminiscences of the days of chivalry, musicians and dances, customs in the true significance of the term, utensils of every description, practices and habits of sulphur-miners, mariners, and fishermen ; he will hear the cries of venders, and words which attempt to translate the sounds of bells and of drums ; all this being the material of the first volume.

"Domestic life in its various periods, its most important acts and solemn occasions, will be described in the second ; and especially marriage, birth, death, the relation of god-son and god-parent, linking, by the means of baptism, birth with the obligations of decency and manliness (*mafia e l' omertà*) ; after which, in close psychological relation, come gestures, surnames generally of an insulting character, imprecations, oaths, salutations. In the third volume usages alternate with the beliefs which illustrate the science of the people in its relation to astronomy, meteorology, agriculture, botany, zoölogy, and notions regarding the sky, stars, meteors, earth, plants, animals. Beliefs and superstitions pure and simple are contained in the fourth volume, where is found, not as in the first three, what is material and concrete, but what is spiritual and abstract ; while to the vegetable and animal kingdom succeeds the supernatural and marvelous, persons and things considered lucky and unlucky, legends of enchanted treasures, beliefs of children. Thus the reader has a picture of what the Sicilian people does, thinks, and believes, and can comprehend how it clothes itself and eats, what rules it follows in the practical conduct of life, its vows, its beliefs in regard to the world which it inhabits and that toward which it aspires : how it understands family, society, law, religion ; a picture at once general and precise, in which will be found an abundance of documents relative to humanity will be found by ethnographers and folk-lorists, sociologists, moralists, and littérateurs. . . . To the students of folk-lore and ethnology in particular, I recommend the usages of superstition, in which ancient generations continue to exist, various governments and extinguished civilizations come to light, with myths and legends of theogonies which history has not yet succeeded in collecting and fixing."

Together with oral tradition, Pitrè has given the written tradition, which often illuminates the former, and establishes its certain antiquity ; and he presents at the end of his chapters such bibliographical references as are desirable. The accomplishment of this task has involved, as may easily be understood, immense labor and pains. As an inhabitant of Palermo and a physician, he has had special opportunities, which he has improved to the utmost, and from the commencement of his task, in the year 1870, to the present time, as he observes, no day has gone by without supplying matter. In his collection are represented all the provinces of Sicily, as well as its minor islands.

We shall have occasion, hereafter, to refer to the special subjects of these volumes, or to discuss principles illustrated by them, and which the writer proposes to treat in the future. What has been said is enough to show the invaluable character of the publication, which will give the recorder a perpetual title of the thanks of ethnologists and students of folk-lore.

W. W. N.